

## Lyon 2006 - European Ideas Fair Speeches

European Ideas Fair

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Second Roundtable - *The European Agenda for Revival*

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My own country, the Netherlands, whilst rejecting the constitutional treaty in our recent referendum, is still a country in which 80% of the people are very happy to be in the European Union. So I would like to take you a little deeper into the psychology of the normal citizen in the street in these days because I think we can learn something from that.

Where did it go wrong in the referendum? Was it because people were completely anti-Europe? No, it was not. It went wrong in the referendum for many reasons.

Firstly: the yes campaign was not good at all; divided - utterly divided, the NO voter populists could set the agenda with things that were absolutely not in the Constitution. How could that happen? Because, of course, politicians of the yes camp were perhaps not convicted enough, but may I go a little deeper. Perhaps we must say that politicians for years and years did not communicate enough how good Europe is, that e.g. my country is rich because of Europe, earns a lot even because of the 10 new Member States. No, we always said: we pay too much to Brussels. If you say that long enough, then people only remember the negative message. A small negative message against the big positive one: that is forgotten. But there is something more. We as Europeans should also blame ourselves a little bit. Because let's be frank: many great developments of the last 10 years are great in theory and even great in facts and figures, but are not perceived as great by the average person. May I quickly mention three things? Our big economic Internal Market, it's very wide: it's one of the key challenges for the future to build onto this. But was it perceived that positively by average people? The figures are positive, but what people perceive is more and more bureaucracy from Brussels, stupid rules. And I'm happy that we have a President of the Commission now that for the first time really cuts bureaucracy. But if we want this to be credible, we must all carry on, the European Parliament included, in this way. And the European People's Party should have the courage to lead further in this direction.

Second: the euro. Everybody said this will be really integrating. Was it perceived positively? No, it was not. It was one of the main reasons why people voted no. Not just because the prices went up during the change from the guilder to the euro, but also because the rules that were set in Maastricht were seriously violated, even by some

of the biggest countries such as Schröder's Germany, and that has really undermined the trust of many people in Europe.

And then thirdly: the open borders. I came here by car, and it's great not to have to stop at the several borders you pass. But did people only perceive as positive this open space, not having border checks? People consider it as positive; 75% like the easier travel. But if you ask people: "do you see it as positive or negative that we have these open borders?" with many people the negative issues prevail. Why? Because we did not have the courage or the conviction to align our policies so that the open border does not bring other problems. Quickly a few points more on this subject.

First, asylum - in my country, we sent back 20,000 people after this Pim Fortuyn thing, when a right-wing populist who almost came to power, because we never sent false asylum seekers back. When we started doing it, it was painful: to send people back where everybody on the street knows some of them as they have been waiting for five years to get a yes or no, and then you send them back to the other side of the world... But where is the credibility? Whilst we were sending back 20,000 people, Zapatero's Spain is handing out 800,000 residence permits to illegal people who are not integrated at all. And when I listen to my friends of the *Partido Popular*, more than 50% of these people are estimated now not to be in Spain anymore, they are in the rest of Europe. And the people know it. They know it, they read it in the press; and I'm not even talking about Joschka Fischer, who gave 850,000 tourist visas to people from the Ukraine to visit Cologne. It's beautiful but I don't think anyone from those people ever saw it, unfortunately. So this is really a big challenge. So let's now really act. We talked in Tampere, we talked in The Hague and said "let's converge our asylum and immigration policies".

Second: security and terror. Open borders brought also more crime - it is proven. I'm from a region with borders all around, we were the safest region; we are now the most unsafe region of my country. Because crimes take place over the border. People live on one side, go to live there, attack, return. And because there is no information exchange between police offices and the judicial system, they have the advantage. It takes months before the information is really passed over. So we need a Data Availability Directive, we need to share information. Also with terrorism: we need to share the information.

Third: if you really want to show something to the people, indeed we should have much more solidarity with a country like Spain that is now facing heavy problems, and we should create one border patrol and also one force consisting of several countries. We should act. There are many plans - our party should have the courage to lead and to move on in terms of safety with open borders. Otherwise we have to close the borders, and that would be very bad.

Foreign affairs: yes, improvements were made, after the debacle of Iraq. No matter what you saw, it was really awful, and it was indefensible. Iran went better, at least we cooperate together, let's see what the end game of this awfully difficult situation will be; and we have sent a lot of troops now to Lebanon. Very good. But the proof of the pudding is really in the eating, so let me express the hope that we also stand united in Europe about the disarmament of Hizbollah: that we stand united in posing Hizbollah one question: either you democratize, and you fight your cause in a peaceful way, or we will all regard you as a terrorist organisation and we won't deal with you anymore.

I finish by mentioning one more issue: enlargement. We are debating Turkey in the European Parliament. People are not against enlargement. But in my country and in many countries people are worried. And this is because we never had the courage to define the borders of Europe, even if it's just for short or intermediate term. We never had the courage to define 'absorption capacity', and until now we have not had enough courage to make the criteria really count. To make the criteria count and say: "the rules are the rules and if you want to be in, you have to apply them". And I think if you talk about credibility, this will be one of the vital things. It's not an easy discussion, but politicians should also tackle the non easy things.

Why am I making these remarks? Because in my country, the Netherlands, where 62% voted NO, 65% of the people want one foreign affairs policy with one minister, 68% want border-passing crime one policy with EU police, 62% want one asylum policy, and 63% want much more credibility in the enlargement process. There's the challenge.

If we really want people to see that the new treaty, even if it's a mini-treaty or a constitutional treaty, If we want them to see that it really helps them in their current day-to-day life, then we must show them now, in the time between now and the discussion on the new treaty, that Europe can really provide answers on these points so critical for average people. So let us not just reflect, let us join reflection and action.